

LAST THING



THE NEXT BIG THING GRAND FINAL
Grosvenor Back Room
Saturday, December 14, 1999.

Someone's always got to be first and lucky for the assembled it was **Proton**, who conveyed a mood that suggested they could play at 8.45 in the morning and make it feel like a delightfully wicked witching hour.

Rapper Ozzie opened with a good-natured diatribe that brought the band in and had floor-fillers 'gettin' down' to that ever ubiquitous 'funky beat'. *Disco Ball* brought out hotspot efforts from bassist Pete Miller, a Siamese twin to his instrument who can evoke the sense of a lead player while imbuing subtlety all the same and Paul Malone, whose scratching wizardry later included an introduction of fire-to-turntable that would make DJ Hendrix proud. Further numbers indicated a mixture of apocalyptic and eclectic (apocalectic?) sounds with disco overtures that scored whoops from the crowd and found gentleman keyboardist Joe Scholz smiling gently, again.

Bulbasaur are as atmospheric as the er, atmosphere — electric guitar driven stuff with cello and a rainbow of flute flavours besides. The six-piece got off to a gentle start, building in

Fourth Floor Collapse deliver power as the set developed, yet with tasteful restraint always at hand. *Bedtime* displayed the stronger elements of Anne Healy's voice (which wavered occasionally) and went further to indicate that Bulbasaur's is a music that is very evocative — perhaps beyond that of their obvious youth. A latter, more rock ridden number, saw the voice/guitar/bass/drums line-up take the focus and it was at this point that it seemed a description of this band could very well be that of Spank-meets-The Holy Sea kinda entity. Either way they're a listenable thing o' beauty.

Prankster (ex-Prankwagon) looked set to soar, with a mixture of pop and punk that took hold in a different direction when Rhys Jones' guitar explored some more riff laden moments. The playing was strong, but with a tendency towards genericism that clouded other moments of individuality. A call for something "fast and furious" by bass player Giles Lowe was met by a ska/thrash number that had a go at something different but fell in a dirge when a sense of dynamic simply failed to appear. While Lowe's pants were threatening to fall down, the trio's set was picking up pace, the final two songs depicting a more focused and immediate edge, but for the most part this night's effort was a bit bitsy for the big result.

Straight outta Bunbury, **Afterburn** looked every bit as young as the 16-18 age group that they are. Having said that the trio depicted a nice way with moody pop songs. The music they favour has built in potential for a certain throwawayness, but with guitarist/vocalist Lee Jones' songs there was heart in those strings. *Days Are Dazy* was quite the lovely ballad, a touch of the Liam Gallaghers coming out in Jones' voice. Drummer Shaun Sibbes may have stated that *Battle Of The Egos* was yet 'another song about women' — youth apparently doesn't equate inexperience — but by set's end Afterburn ended with a multifaceted number, *Jabiluka*, that showed an ability to be earnest without falling in the trap of being too corny. Mind you, it just made it. Overall though, it was real promising stuff.

Fourth Floor Collapse have come a long way in the last year, and this appearance would be the pay-off (to this point at least). Immediately guitarist Rhys Kealley was teasing his instrument, giving a visual edge to the harrowing, yet beatific music on offer. Vocalist Mike Miller comes across as quite the artiste — baggy shirt, goatee and impassioned, yet slightly awkward body movements as the band takes him somewhere far off, almost as far as his reaching vocals do. At these moments talk of Thom Yorke springs to mind, but Fourth Floor

Collapse also evoke moods not dissimilar to Died Pretty. Goofy banter sometimes threatened to undo the heftier aspects, but Fourth Floor Collapse opt for a sense of intensity and a flair for drama that is rarely seen in Perth.

Hobyards went at it with some gusto, it must be said. Their opener, *Little Old Lady*, was a bold number, a kind of caustic pop feel that included a somewhat ambitious stab at eliciting crowd participation. Oasis sprang to mind for the second time on this night, this time in the form of vocalist Dave Kelly, whose melodic talking style of singing went halfway to echoing Liam G, his physical demeanour going the rest of the way. It was endearing stuff that got better as *Make Me Feel Unreal* upped spirits that were already high and *Champion* got down to more brow-furrowed matters. They didn't place, but Hobyards were ace.

MC Stu Badhair got some deserved laughs during the night, but the mix of entertainment and procrastination prior to the winners' announcement was agonising and needless, though sweetened by some heckling from folks who really oughta know better. Third place: Bulbasaur. Second place: Proton. The winners were Fourth Floor Collapse, who really did shine. Well done to the bands, the organisers Scott and Karen, and anyone who feels they deserve it.

— BOB GORDON.



Proton receive their second place praise as Badhair wonders where he wrote the winner's name